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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000594

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DEPARTMENT FOR PRM AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2017

TAGS: [PREF PHUM PREL KPKO MO](#)

SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: UNHCR CBMS PLAYING AN IMPORTANT
ROLE

REF: 06 RABAT 1394

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (C) Summary: Embassy Rabat strongly urges the Department to look favorably upon requests for continued financial support of UNHCR's "confidence building measures" (CBMs) program in Western Sahara. The CBMs have injected a hopeful and positive element into a conflict which has often seemed intractable and has created links between sides that have often seemed irreconcilable. Very significantly, the Government of Morocco (GOM), which was previously a skeptical and reluctant partner in the CBM process, is now an active supporter. This hopeful sign is the strongest indication that we should continue funding this UNHCR program, and in so doing exploit a potential break in the long dormant diplomatic process. End Summary.

12. (C) Embassy Rabat understands UNHCR is approaching the PRM Bureau with a request for continued financial support for its CBM activities in Western Sahara. The Embassy strongly supports this request. The centerpiece of UNHCR's CBM activities in Western Sahara has been the reciprocal family visits between Sahrawi families in the refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria and their relatives in Layounne, Smara, and Dakhla in Moroccan-controlled Sahara. UNHCR, in partnership with MINURSO, flies family members in both directions for reunification visits.

13. (C) The humanitarian benefits are substantial. The political benefits are subtle yet significant. The reciprocal visits make clear the realities of living in the Moroccan controlled Western Sahara on one side and life in the Polisario-run camps on the other. These flights have also brought about actual, if indirect, coordination between the Moroccan, Algerian, and Polisario authorities. This modest level of coordination is an essential precursor to the more substantial levels of trust and cooperation that will be required for successful implementation of a settlement. The telephone kiosks, a second element of the CBMs, have also supported the free flow of information and direct communication among separated families - providing a smaller scale humanitarian benefit.

14. (C) Comment: We strongly support the continuation of the CBMs. The GOM's support is a significant change in attitude for which we lobbied and which we welcome. The summer 2006 hiatus (reftel) was blamed by Morocco on the Polisario (and vice versa) and resulted in an intensification of negative

rhetoric between Morocco and Algeria. The GOM's desire to continue the CBMs, while not necessarily motivated by humanitarian concerns, reinforces its stated desire to create an opening for political dialogue leading to a resolution of the Western Sahara dispute. End comment.

Visit Embassy Rabat's Classified Website;
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>

RILEY